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## TALUS: THE LAW

BY FREDERICK MORGAN PADELFOED

In his *English Writers*, Morley identifies Talus, the attendant or squire of Artegall, the hero of the Legend of Justice in the *Faerie Queene*, with "the abstract principle of Justice—swift to overtake offenders, strong to punish, untouched by passion or pity, irresistible." Now if Talus is justice in the abstract, Artegall must be justice in the concrete. In that case, however, Artegall ought to be the squire of Talus, and not Talus the squire of Artegall. As a matter of fact, the real office of Talus is explicitly stated when the character is first introduced. While Astraea was upon earth, Talus was her attendant,

But when she parted hence she left her groome,  
An yron man, which did on her attend  
Alwayes to execute her stedfast doome,  
And willed him with Artegall to wend,  
And doe what ever thing he did intend:  
His name was Talus, made of yron mould,  
Immoveable, resistlesse, without end;  
Who in his hand an yron flae did hould,  
With which he thresht out falshood, and did truth unfould. (V. 1. 12.)

That which executes the judgments of justice, threshes out falsehood and unfolds truth, is not the "abstract principle of Justice," but the law and its ministers. I take the character of Talus, then, to represent the law and the agents who enforce it. The epithets "immoveable" and "resistlesse" well express the rigor of the law, and the "yron flae," the pitiless methods by which the iron law wrenches the truth from those suspected of guilt or punishes those proved guilty. In a verse which lends further support to this interpretation, Talus is called, "The true guide of his (Artegall's) way and vertuous government," for the law is the foundation of government, and the guide of the courts in the application of justice.

This interpretation of the character of Talus will be borne out, I think, by a review of the episodes in which the character figures. The first canto shows justice dealing with a domestic problem. As Artegall and Talus are proceeding on their journey to assist Irena, they come upon a youth lamenting beside the headless body of a

lady. It develops that a certain knight, Sir Sanglier, had been riding in attendance upon this lady, but that when he saw the beautiful companion of the squire who is now lamenting, he took possession of this lady and renounced his former love. Imploring death rather than desertion, she met death at his hands. Talus is sent in pursuit of Sanglier, and identifies her by circumstantial evidence:

Whom at the first he ghesseed by his looke,  
And by the other markes which of his shield he tooke. (V. 1. 20.)

After sentence is passed upon the disdainful miscreant—to bear the murdered lady's head upon his breast—it is Talus who executes the sentence.

In the second canto, justice deals with extortion, in the persons of Pollente and Munera, the sarazin and his daughter who exact toll from all who pass by their castle, and with communism, in the person of the blustering giant who pretends to be the champion of the common herd, the victims of his demagogism.<sup>1</sup> When Talus storms the castle, Munera tries to appease him with fair words,

But when as yet she saw him to procede  
Unmov'd with praiers or with piteous thought,  
She ment him to corrupt with goodly meede;  
And causde great sakes with endlesse riches fraught  
Unto the battilment to be upbrought,  
And powred forth over the Castle wall,  
That she might win some time, though dearly bought,  
Whilest he to gathering of the gold did fall;  
But he was nothing mov'd nor tempted therewithall. (V. 2. 23.)

In other words, finding that the law is unmoved by entreaty, the extortioner tries to corrupt it with bribes.

Entered within the castle, it is Talus who at last finds Munera, suggesting the power of the law in tracing crime:

Long they sought, yet no where could they finde her,  
That sure they ween'd she was escapt away;  
But Talus, that could like a lime-hound winde her,  
And all things secrete wisely could bewray,  
At length found out whereas she hidden lay  
Under an heape of gold.

<sup>1</sup> See the author's paper on "Spenser's Arraignment of the Anabaptists," *Jour. Eng. and Germ. Phil.*, 12. 3.

Though Artegall rues the unhappy plight of Munera,

Yet for no pity would he change the course  
Of Justice, which in Talus hand did lye,

for justice must allow the law to punish such an enemy of society.

In the second episode of the canto, Talus shoulders the loud-mouthed giant off the land, just as the law forced the Anabaptists to leave England in 1568. The assault which the noisy rabble then make upon Talus corresponds to the protest that was made against this legislation by those who sympathized with the sect, and just as the "lawlesse multitude" hid in holes and bushes when Talus retaliated, so these Anabaptists sympathizers were silenced by the law.<sup>2</sup>

In the third canto, justice deals with defrauders, personated by the false Florimel, Braggadochio, and Trompart. Talus shows how the law treats such impostors by breaking the sword of Braggadochio, depriving him of his shield, and scourging him and his accomplice out of court.

In the opening episode of Canto IV, the settlement of the dispute between Bracidas and Amidas, justice is concerned with property rights. In this unique episode, Talus, "that great yron groome," is in attendance upon Artegall as "his gard and government," a most significant expression, as defining his office.

The concluding episode of this canto introduces the question of woman's place in government. A crowd of women, followers of Radigund, who prides herself on reducing all knights to servitude, "like tyrants mercilesse" are leading forth an unfortunate captive, Sir Turpine, to execution. When Artegall inquires as to the offence, the women swarm about him, thinking to lay hands on him as well:

But he was soone aware of their ill minde,  
And drawing backe deceived their intent:  
Yet, though him selfe did shame on womankinde  
His mighty hand to shend, he Talus sent  
To wrecke on them their follies hardyment:  
Who with few sowces of his yron flae  
Dispersed all their troupe incontinent,  
And sent them home to tell a piteous tale  
Of their vaine prowesse turned to their proper bale. (V. 4. 24.)

<sup>2</sup> See Strype, *Life and Acts of Archbishop Grindal*, 181.

Although I am satisfied that there is a rather specific historical allegory lurking in this episode, in its universal import it concerns the old question of woman's political and legal rights, which had been freshly brought to the fore by Knox's "Monstrous Regiment of Women" and the lively and persistent discussion which it aroused. Knox makes elaborate citations from the laws and quotes abundantly the opinions of Aristotle and the church fathers upon this question:

"I except such as God by singular priuiledge, and for certein causes knowen onlie to him selfe, hath exempted from the common ranke of women, and do speake of women as nature and experience do this day declare them. Nature I say, doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe: and experience hath declared them to be vnconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. . . . Yea they further shuld pronounce, that where women reigne or be in authoritie, that there must nedes vanitie be preferred to vertue, ambition and pride to temperancie and modestie, and finallie, that auarice the mother of all mischefe must nedes deuour equitie and iustice (*Arist. 2. Politic*). But lest that we shall seme to be of this opinion alone, let vs heare what others haue seen and decreed in this mater. In the rules of the lawe thus it is written: Women are remoued from all ciuille and publike office, so that they nether may be iudges, nether may they occupie the place of the magistrate, nether yet may they be speakers for other (*Lib. 50 de regulis iuris*). The same is repeted in the third and in the sixteenth bokes of the digestes: Where certein persones are forbidden, *Ne pro aliis postulent*, that is, that they be no speakers nor aduocates for others (*3. 16. lib. Digestorum*). And among the rest are women forbidden, and this cause is added, that they do not against shamefastnes intermedle themselues with the causes of others, nether yet that women presume to vse the offices due to men (*Ad Senatus-consult. Velleianum*). The lawe in the same place doth further declare, that a naturall shamfastnes oght to be in womankind, whiche most certeinlie she loseth, when soeuer she taketh vpon her the office and estate of man (*Lib. 3. de postulatione*). . . . In the first boke of the digestes, it is pronounced that the condition of the woman in many cases is worse then of the man. As in iurisdiction (saith the lawe) in receiuing of cure and tuition, in adoption, in publike accusation, in delation, in all popular action, and in motherlie power, which she hath vpon her owne sonnes (*De statu hominum, Titul. 8.*). The lawe further will not permit, that the woman geue any thing to her husband, because it is against the nature of her kinde, being the inferiour membre to presume to geue any thing to her head (*Dig. lib. 24. de donatione inter virum et foeninam*). The lawe doth more ouer pronounce womankinde to be the most auaricious (which is a vice intolerable in those that shulde rule or minister iustice) (*Lib. 1. Digest. de le gib. et senatuscon, Titul. 3.*). And Aristotle, as before is touched, doth plainly affirme, that wher soeuer women beare dominion, there

must nedes the people be disorded, liuinge and abounding in all intemperancie, geuen to pride, excesse, and vanitie. And finallie in the end, that they must nedes come to confusion and ruine (*Politic. 2.*).<sup>3</sup>

Spenser compresses the same conclusions into the following stanza, taking pains—as also in the character of Britomart (Elizabeth)—to make due allowance for one notable exception to this general condemnation of women:

Such is the crueltie of womenkynd,  
When they have shaken off the shamefast band,  
With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd  
T' obey the heasts of mans well-ruling hand,  
That then all rule and reason they withstand  
To purchase a licentious libertie:  
But vertuous women wisely understand,  
That they were borne to base humilitie,  
Unlesse the heavens them lift to lawfull soveraintie. (V. 5. 25.)

In his harsh dispersal of the troops of women who attend Radigund, Talus obviously figures as the law.

The fifth canto is peculiarly significant. Artegall, having made the foolish compact with Radigund that whichever was worsted in combat should become subject to the other, is paying the price of his folly by abject servitude. Now, although Talus is the squire of Artegall, expressly assigned the office by Astraea, he refrains from any effort to rescue his lord because he holds an agreement to be sacred:

Yet all that while he would not once assay  
To reskew his owne Lord, but thought it just t' obey. (V. 5. 19.)

Thus scrupulously does the poet imply that it is the duty of the law to recognize the inviolability of a contract, even though the contract itself be a vicious one.

In the sixth canto, Talus exemplifies—as elsewhere—the watchfulness of the law by his nocturnal vigilance in the castle of Dolon, where he guards the person of Britomart, who, now become the exemplar of justice, is hastening to the relief of Artegall:

Ne lesse did Talus suffer sleepe to seaze  
His eye-lids sad, but watcht continually,  
Lying without her dore in great disease:  
Like to a Spaniell wayting carefully  
Least any should betray his Lady treacherously. (V. 6. 26.)

<sup>3</sup> Arber ed. 12-14.

With his flail he scatters the "raskall rout" who seek to capture Britomart, for the law is the defender and the preserver of justice.

In the seventh canto, while Britomart is engaged in overcoming Radigund, Talus enters the castle of the Amazon and slays her women, until Britomart in pity stays his hand. The law itself knows no pity. Britomart now restores justice in Radigone, by re-establishing man's rule:

During which space she there as Princess rained,  
And changing all that forme of common-weale  
The liberty of women did repeale,  
Which they had long usurpt; and, them restoring  
To men's subjection, did true Justice deale,  
That all they, as a Goddesse her adoring,  
Her wisdom did admire, and hearkned to her loring. (V. 7. 42.)

With the eighth canto, Spenser turns his attention to the display of justice in national and international situations. In these episodes Talus would seem to represent military force, that force which is the exponent of national or international justice. The defeat of the Spanish Armada is commonly thought to be represented in the struggle of Prince Arthur and the Soldan. Prince Arthur—the Grace of God—wins this signal victory for England. He is attended by Talus:

And by his stirrup Talus did attend,  
Playing his pages part, as he had beene  
Before directed by his Lord; to th' end  
He should his fiale to final execution bend. (V. 8. 29.)

If my general thesis be correct, this is a figurative way of saying that in this struggle English arms were the strong ally of the Divine Purpose.

In the ninth canto, as Artegall and Prince Arthur journey to the court of Mercilla—Elizabeth—, they learn of Guyle, who lives in a nearby cave. They agree to exterminate the monster, and it is Talus who, after the monster has assumed, in his cunning, a variety of shapes, finally captures and kills him. As the balance of this canto and the opening stanzas of the next are given over to the vindication of England's policy in executing Mary Queen of Scots, it seems not unlikely that the character of Guyle is intended to represent Mary's crafty allies in England, especially

the unfortunate Duke of Norfolk, who, after many sinuous turnings and twistings, was finally brought to execution in 1572.

The major portion of the tenth canto and the first half of the eleventh are concerned with England's succor of the Low Countries, Prince Arthur represented as going to the relief of Belge, newly-widowed. Talus does not accompany Prince Arthur on this expedition, but attends his own knight, Artegall, who in the meantime has returned to his original quest of relieving Irena.

As they proceed, Artegall, after much indecision, is induced to lend his aid to Bourbon. Literally, this of course means that Spenser entertained some doubt as to whether or not justice was on the side of Henry IV. In the struggle which ensues, Talus chases the base rabble over hill and dale,

Ne ceased not, till all their scattered crew  
Into the sea he drove quite from that soyle,  
The which they troubled had with great turmoyle. (V. 11. 65.)

Such were the stern methods of military suppression by which Henry established his beneficent reign.

In Canto Twelve, Artegall finally achieves his quest, the relief of Irena. As all scholars agree, this canto deals with the English policy in Ireland. Artegall represents justice as personified in Lord Grey, and Talus represents the harsh laws that were made for the subjugation of the Irish and the harsh military methods by which Lord Grey sought to enforce these laws:

During which time that he did there remayne,  
His studie was true Justice how to deale,  
And day and night employ'd his busie paine  
How to reforme that rugged common-weale:  
And that same yron man, which could reveale  
All hidden crimes, through all that realme he sent  
To search out those that usd to rob and steale,  
Or did rebell gainst lawfull government;  
On whom he did inflict most grievous punishment. (V. 12. 26.)

The last mention of Talus is in the concluding stanza of the book, where he is barely restrained from attacking Envy, who has sought to poison the good name of Artegall—Grey—upon his return to Faerie Land, a manifest reference to the abuse which Grey received upon his return to England:



But Talus, hearing her so lewdly raile,  
And speake so ill of him that well deserved,  
Would her have chastiz'd with his yron flaile,  
If her Sir Artegall had not preserved,  
And him forbidden, who his heast observed.

This means, I take it, that mere detraction does not properly come within the scope of the law. The public servant, or that justice which he embodies, must expect to be misunderstood, and defamation is not to be remedied by a harsh resort to law, however strong the inclination to attempt it.

Such, in brief, is the interesting part that Talus plays in this legend of justice. There can be little doubt, I think, that Spenser intends the character to stand for the law.

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